DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 029 579 HE 000 738

By-Axelrod, Joseph
Quest for Relevance.
California Univ., Berkeley. Center for Research and Development in Higher Education.
Spons Agency-American Association for Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
Pub Date 3 Mar 69
Note-4p.; Summary of statement presented at the 24th National Conference on Higher Education, Chicago, Illinois, March 3, 1969
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.30
Descriptors-•Faculty, Higher Education, •Learning Processes, •Participant Satisfaction, •Student Development, Student Participation, •Teaching Techniques

During an analysis of the nature of the curricular-instructional process of US higher education, faculty members were classified into 5 prototypes based on their styles of teaching. The recitation class teacher limits the process of reasoning by students. The content-centered faculty member helps his students to master what "knowledgeable" people in the field are expected to know. The instructor-centered professor's students learn to approach problems in the field as he himself approaches them. The intellect-centered professor helps students to acquire intellectual skills and abilities that use reason and language as major tools, with problem-solving as the major means. The person-centered faculty member helps students to develop as individuals along all the dimensions where growth seems necessary or desirable, rather than to develop their intellectual abilities only. Relevance has more to do with the nature of learning and how a student goes about studying than it has to do with the subject matter itself. What presents some serious implications for the future of college instruction is that traditional US colleges are hostile to the teaching style of the person-centered professor--the only style that can accommodate active student participation in the teaching-learning process and therefore make the subject matter relevant to today's students. (WM)

ED029579

(14)

AXELROD, JOESPH

QUEST FOR RELEVANCE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

HE 000 738

Information Session A
Monday evening, March 3

# QUEST FOR RELEVANCE*

Joseph Axelrod
Project Director
Center for Research and Development in Higher Education
University of California, Berkeley
(On leave, San Francisco State College)

I want to begin with some observations about the ideology of "relevance" -- an ideology that many faculty members are suspicious of. They are suspicious of it because they take its meaning to be this: Anything that isn't "Here And Now" is out.

For example, my colleagues in literature (I'm thinking particularly of the more traditional ones) are suspicious because they think they would have to teach King Lear as though it were a play written by Samuel Beckett. Or that they would have to teach the lyric poetry of Mao Tse-tung (written in the days when he was a poet), and they don't feel comfortable in any literature outside of western literature. Or because they think they are going to have to teach the poetry of Bob Dylan; and they are not about to accept a University of California sociologist's view of Dylan as the prophet and explicator of the future.

But I am persuaded that these colleagues have the wrong notion of what relevance means. It does not mean modernity. A course in black American history, if it is done as pendantically as our book-oriented courses in white American history, will turn out to be as irrelevant as they are. Waiting for Godot, taught the way Hamlet usually is taught, will not retain any relevance. In other words, relevance has little to do with subject matter per se. It has more to do with the relationship between a student and the material he is studying. It has a great deal to do with the way he goes about studying it. It has more to do with the nature of learning than with any particular subject matter.

Let me pause here to make a linguistic observation. When we think of a student in a passive role -- when we think of him as a recipient -- we use the passive voice of the verb "to teach"; we say the student is "being taught." When we think of a student in an active role -- as the initiator of action -- we have to use an active form of verb. We cannot say he is "being taught"; we have to say he "is learning." Now the ideology of relevance asserts that under certain conditions, the student is free to learn; and under other conditions, he is a captive who is being forced into a passive role, a role in which he is being taught. The difference between passivity and activity in the educative process is crucial.[1] It is like the difference between death and life.

---

*Summary of statement presented to Information Session A on "Quest for relevance in college teaching" at the 24th National Conference on Higher Education, sponsored by the American Association for Higher Education, Chicago, Monday evening, March 3. Permission to quote restricted.

[1]Examples of new curricular models illustrating this principle can be found in chapter 9 (entitled "Four New Models") of Search for Relevance by Joseph Axelrod, Mervin B. Freedman, Winslow R. Hatch, Joseph Katz, and Nevitt Sanford (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), 1969.

II

During the last year and a half, I have been directing a project at Berkeley in which we have been analyzing the nature of the curricular-instructional process.[2] In the course of that study, we have developed a typology of college faculty members. According to our analysis, there are five prototypes among faculty members on today's campuses:

TYPE A: THE RECITATION CLASS TEACHER

In sessions led by Type A faculty members, ratiocinative processes are kept at a minimum. The skills to be acquired, or the information to be mastered, are of such a nature as to render the process of discovery or any kind of 'reasoning out' unnecessary. To the contrary: students are expected to develop automatic or semi-automatic responses and not reason things out. Success is achieved when a student responds correctly to a cue, to an exercise situation, or to a 'problem,' without using the reasoning process at all.

TYPE B: THE CONTENT-CENTERED FACULTY MEMBER

The teaching of the Type-B instructor is organized around his desire to help students master, at the appropriate level, the facts, principles, concepts, analytic tools, theories, applications, etc., that 'knowledgeable' people in the field are expected to know.

TYPE C: THE INSTRUCTOR-CENTERED FACULTY MEMBER

The teaching of the Type-C instructor is organized around his desire to help students learn to approach problems in the field as he himself approaches them. What differentiates him from the Type B is that he does not organize knowledge of his field in the standard way; it is rather the force of his personality and his point of view that gives shape to that knowledge.

TYPE D: THE INTELLECT-CENTERED FACULTY MEMBER

The teaching of the Type-D instructor is organized around his desire to help students acquire a set of skills and abilities that are intellectual in nature and that use reason and language as their major tools, with problem-solving as the major means.

TYPE E: THE PERSON-CENTERED FACULTY MEMBER

The teaching of the Type-E instructor is organized around his desire to help students develop as individual persons along all the dimensions where growth appears necessary or desirable. What differentiates him from Type D is that, although both may be described as "student-centered," the Type E instructor does not accept the separation of intellectual development from other aspects of individual development.

In considering this typology, please keep in mind that inquiry and problem-solving are the major teaching means of all the types except Type A. Furthermore, Types A and B may both be characterized as "subject-matter-centered faculty members" while Types D and E may both be characterized as "student-centered faculty members." Yet each one of these types is distinct from all of the others. It is our view, on the basis of watching faculty members working with their students in and out of class-

---

[2]An interim report of this investigation can be found in the Research Reporter for December, 1968, published by the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, California. Copies are available on request. (Zip code: 94720)

rooms, that each of these teaching styles must not be taken as a loose set of classroom and teaching devices that combine in some haphazard way; each is rather a unified style governed by a complex set of principles that work together in an intricate pattern. Moreover, we cannot characterize one type as "good" and another as "bad." Each style has its own excellence; some Type A teachers whom we observed did their job excellently and others appeared to us (and their students) to have done it badly. But the reason some Type A teachers are bad is not because they are Type A teachers but because they are bad teachers. Thus, a Type E teacher may be a very bad teacher indeed; but we saw some Type E teachers whom colleagues and students regarded as highly successful. The point I am making is that each type has its own excellence.

If we now ask the question, "Does one of these five styles fit the philosophy and practice of active student participation in the teaching-learning process--please recall our earlier discussion of the term 'relevance'--Does one of these five styles fit the ideology of relevance better than the others?" our answer is: "Yes; Type E does."

This, then, is my first major point. Only one of the five teaching styles, namely, Type E, can accommodate with ease--without the necessity for significant adjustment, without great strain--the activities that the ideology of 'relevance' calls for on the part of students in the teaching-learning process.

We are now ready for my second major point, but I am sure you have already anticipated what it is. Type E faculty are the ones who are least comfortable in the standard curricular-instructional setup, that is, the system that exists on the vast majority of American campuses. According to our findings, the faculty members whom we classified as Type E are the ones that express the greatest discomfort with the standard curricular-instructional framework.

Types B and C are extremely comfortable on a typical American campus. Type D is comfortable in those settings where his intellectual emphasis is reinforced by the campus climate. But Type E faculty members are often defensive about their teaching philosophy and practice. Traditional colleagues ridicule them, often painting caricatures of them as "baby-sitting" instead of teaching, lowering standards, being soft in grading, and so on. The typical gamesman-type student misunderstands and takes advantage of his Type E faculty members. Such a student does not understand why his Type E instructors refuse to play the Game. (This is the Academic Game in which a faculty member tries to make students suffer as much as possible for the lowest wage he can pay--that is, in grades--while the student, engaged in an often terrifying competition with his teacher, tries to get the best wage he can for the least suffering.)

Unless a Type E faculty member is on a campus that is itself dominantly person-centered--emphasizing the total growth of the individual rather than the development of intellectual abilities only, or the mastery of subject matter only, or preparation for a specific job--unless he is on a campus dominated by that philosophy, or unless he is within a pocket of innovation based on that philosophy (on an otherwise traditional campus), the Type E faculty member is apt to be unhappy.

Like most investigations, the results of this one do not, I am sure, come as a surprise to anyone. I think we would all have said, just on the basis of our own observation, that the standard American campus is hostile to the teaching style represented by Type E. But since this is the only one of the five Types that fits the philosophy and practice of active student participation in the teaching-learning process, we face some serious implications for the future of college instruction. I shall now leave those implications hanging, heavily, in the air; and I hope we have a chance to explore them in the discussion period.